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AUTHOR	Johnson, Marilyn; Werstler, Jeffrey; Allwardt, Alys; DeLacy, Margaret; Reid, Michael; Weinmenn, Sheila
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ABSTRACT

This position paper from the District TAG [talented and gifed] Advisory Committee addresses many of the educational issues that are of concern to parents of talented and gifted children in Portland, Oregon. The paper is divided into 16 topical areas, including: (1) identification and assessment; (2) gifted student plans; (3) rate and level programs to meet the needs of TAG students; (4) timely delivery of services; (5) data collection and evaluation to ensure compliance; (6) early entry; (7) exceptionally gifted children; (8) geographically isolated children; (9) social and emotional needs of gifted children; (10) time with intellectual peers; (11) communication between and among teachers, parents, students, principals, and administrators; (12) leadership to provide checks and balances to ensure that appropriate TAG services are consistently delivered throughout the district; (13) budget assurances that the benefit from TAG funds are maximized for TAG students; (14) teacher preparation for TAG students; (15) retaining the option of a self-contained accelerated program; and (16) parents' and students' responsibilities. Each section has a goal and then lists supported steps towards the goals. Positions opposite to DTAC-approved goals are also listed. (CR)

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Meeting the Needs of TAG Children in Portland Public Schools
A District TAG Advisory Committee (DTAC) Position Paper

written by Steering Committee members
Marilyn Johnson, chair, Jeffrey Werstler, Vice Chair,
Alys Allwardt, Margaret DeLacy, Michael Reid, and Sheila Weinmann

The District Tag Advisory Committee is sponsored by the Portland Public School District. It is composed of parents of TAG children throughout the district. Its purpose is to advocate for Talented and Gifted (TAG) students, advise the district concerning policies and programs for TAG children, and to support and inform parents about TAG issues. All parents, teachers, and administrators are welcome to attend meetings.

The following is a position paper prepared by DTAC. It addresses many of the issues which are of concern to TAG parents. It is an attempt to put into writing a position on many of the concerns which are repeatedly raised by parents at DTAC meetings.

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IDENTIFICATION/ ASSESSMENT

GOAL : To identify all potential TAG students, to assess the appropriate level of instructional services for these children, and to maintain on-going assessment data facilitating a continuous delivery of appropriate services throughout the students' time in the Portland Public Schools.

NOMINATION :
DTAC supports

1) written notification of parents' right to nominate their child for TAG services.

2) responsibility of teaching staff to nominate potential TAG students, with subsequent parental consent.

IDENTIFICATION :
DTAC supports

1) written parental notification prior to testing, specifying the date and nature of individual tests to be administered. The law (OAR 581-21-030) already specifies that parents be informed in their native language and that permission be obtained for individual intelligence testing.

2) parental option to be present during the individual testing of kindergarten and first graders. Pros and cons should be discussed with the parents who feel this option is appropriate for their child.

3) tailoring identification processes for specific groups.

   K - 2 : preliminary identification of TAG children utilizing the Frasier (or like) model combined with intellectual ability tests. Availability of academic testing for early readers.

   3 - 8 : preliminary identification of TAG children utilizing the Frasier (or like) model combined with academic achievement tests. Availability of intellectual ability tests for potential TAG children to identify gifted underachievers, learning disabled, poor communicators, and ESL TAG children.

   9 - 12 : development of a uniform method for identifying new TAG students at the high school level.

   transfer students : establishment of a process for identifying potential TAG students within one month of transfer into PPS.

4) acceptance of scores at or above the 97th percentile for PALT or nationally-normed IQ or achievement tests as sufficient to identify a student for TAG services. Parent evaluation could provide the second piece of documentation required by law.

5) uninterrupted TAG services once a student has been identified unless and until contradictory information is obtained.

6) notification of parental right to request additional testing and to appeal decision denying TAG status.

DTAC opposes

1) use of a single test score or teacher report as the basis for disqualification from TAG.

2) delay of services in subsequent years while efforts are directed at identification or reidentification of additional TAG students.

3) delaying teacher nominations under the assumption that PALT scores will identify more children in the spring.

ASSESSMENT :
DTAC supports

1) availability of academic achievement tests for TAG 1st and 2nd graders to assess appropriate level of instruction.

2) regular "out-of-level" achievement tests to determine level of appropriate instruction, e.g., the secondary School Admission Test (SSAT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) for grades 5 through 9.

3) development of a formal, quarterly record-keeping system for out-of-grade level progress, particularly through accelerated curriculum, to facilitate continued progress in subsequent years.

4) formal reevaluation of methods for assessing TAG students in individual disciplines, such as social studies and science.

DTAC opposes

1) use of current statewide math and writing assessments for individual placement and planning individual gifted student programs. (These assessment tools have been designed for group evaluation and have not been validated for individual assessment, particularly for the 'outliers' represented by gifted students.)

2) time-consuming assessment of previously identified students before initiation of services in subsequent years.

REPORTING OF TEST RESULTS :
DTAC supports

1) classroom teachers and parents receive written results of individual tests, with relevant interpretive information, within 10 school days.

2) parents receive Spring PALT scores no later than 10 school days before the last day of school. Included will be the percentile rankings for each grade level and an indication of the grade level at which the child's scores represent the 80th percentile.

GIFTED STUDENT PLANS (GSPs)

GOAL : To ensure that the planning process results in instruction that meets students' rate and level needs.

DTAC supports

1) a separate GSP (or section) for each subject in which a student is gifted.

2) GSP's that include specific assessment information concerning the student's current level of achievement and rate of learning, including the grade level that is needed for appropriate instruction.

3) GSP's that contain services that are specifically linked to the assessment information, and can be shown to be designed to provide each student with the rate and level of instruction that is needed.

4) GSP's that describe in specific terms, including materials, curricula, and class placement, the services to be offered to the student.

5) GSP's that describe services that are specifically tailored to the individual student and are different from those provided to other students performing at grade level.

6) GSP's that specify the work that will **not** be required of a student in order to release time for more advanced work.

7) GSP's that contain provisions for quarterly written evaluation, and specify what activities, achievements, and student products will be included in the evaluation. This quarterly evaluation would most efficiently be incorporated into the quarterly report card.

8) modification of a GSP if quarterly evaluation shows the plan to be unsatisfactory.

9) GSP's and quarterly evaluations that can be used by teachers in subsequent years for providing smooth articulation and avoiding repetition of work already completed or curriculum already mastered.

DTAC opposes

1) vague, generic, or "boilerplate" GSP's, that are written for TAG students as a group, do not address individual needs, or do not differentiate instruction.

2) GSP's that describe teaching strategies or use adjectives such as "challenging," "open-ended," "cooperative" or even "advanced" in place of providing specific information about curricula, materials, and grade level.

3) GSP's that include activities, such as field trips, that the entire class participates in, rather than activities that meet individual needs.

4) GSP's that are not signed, do not satisfy the students or parents, are not carried out, or do not provide a mechanism for certifying that they have been fulfilled.

RATE AND LEVEL PROGRAMS

GOAL : To provide each TAG child with appropriate instruction at their assessed level and differentiated rate of learning.

DTAC supports

1) instructional acceleration to the grade level for which a student's test score would represent the 80th percentile of achievement.

2) flexible ability grouping.

3) curriculum compacting.

4) **substitution** of appropriate work and homework for work that does not meet rate and level needs.

5) establishing district-wide benchmark standards for various subjects

   a) to place students at the appropriate level.

   b) to evaluate the rate of a student's progress.

6) teacher interaction/facilitation for independent or self-directed work/projects, particularly in elementary and middle school. We recommend one hour facilitation for every 3-4 hours of independent work.

7) programs which facilitate group acceleration, such as honors, advanced, and AP classes.

DTAC opposes

1) use of extracurricular programs to meet rate and level needs.

2) assignments that add to, instead of replacing, standard age-level curriculum.

3) assigning independent work that uses more than one third of the school week.

4) use of enrichment classes in lieu of rate and level instruction.

TIMELY DELIVERY OF SERVICES

GOAL : To ensure that TAG children receive services in a timely fashion.

DTAC supports

1) development of an appropriate gifted student plan (GSP) for each TAG student prior to the fall parent-teacher conference.

2) a verification process to ensure the existence of signed GSPs for all TAG students 1 week after fall parent-teacher conferences. Administrative support for resolution of those cases with missing or unsigned GSP's.

3) initiation of appropriate rate and level instruction within 30 days of identification.

4) written quarterly evaluations of student progress relative to their gifted student plans. These should be sent home with report cards.

5) timely reporting of all testing scores to parents. PALT scores should be received by parents no less than 10 days prior to the last day of school.

DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION

GOAL : To determine compliance with the state TAG mandate, satisfaction with provided services, and to fine tune services.

DTAC supports

1) continued collection of information by teachers.

2) separately surveying teachers, parents, and students to locate successes to be duplicated and to locate and correct problem areas.

3) follow-up studies of district policies and programs, such as early entry, to determine which programs have been successful and which students have benefited.

4) yearly regional meetings of principals, TAG coordinators, and parents to review TAG program implementation.

4) retention of district test and evaluation department and continued administration of PALT and other standardized tests.

EARLY ENTRY

GOAL : To maintain the option of early entry, where appropriate, for the families of gifted children.

DTAC supports

1) communication of available programs to the families of young gifted children.

2) retaining the existing screening and counseling process before initiating testing.

3) waiver of screening fees for families whose children qualify for free or reduced lunch.

4) retaining the existing district testing of potential early entry candidates.

5) relaxing the criteria for early entry, especially with respect to physical maturity and motor skills.

6) counseling families after testing regarding the benefits and disadvantages of early entry.

7) allowing family's wishes to strongly influence the final decision for early entry, provided that the child meets the criteria for TAG identification.

8) regular follow-up counseling for children accepted for early entry

EXCEPTIONALLY GIFTED

GOAL : To establish a mechanism for providing appropriate rate and level education for exceptionally gifted children (about 1 child in a thousand.)

DTAC supports

1) recognition that

   a.) there is a larger variability in intellectual capability at the upper limits of testing.

   b.) 'exceptionally gifted' children have abilities so great that their instructional needs and rate and level of learning are distinct from those of other TAG identified children.

2) establishing a policy for the identification of 'exceptionally gifted' children. Possible indicators are :

   IQ of 150 or greater
   tested mental age that is 1.5 times the mean
   scores on a nationally standardized test representing the 99.6 percentile
   demonstrated ability to perform at five or more grade levels beyond age-appropriate grade level material in one or more subject areas
   exceptional performance in several areas assessed using a multivariant model such as the Frasier model, and obvious distinction from classmates

3) grouping exceptionally gifted children for at least 1/3 of their school day to facilitate learning and diminish sense of isolation. As these children are quite rare, this may mean grouping into only one or two schools in the district. (Note: skipping 1 or 2 grades will not group the exceptionally gifted child with intellectual peers and should not be used as the sole modification to their academic program.)

4) providing a specialist, possibly a tutor, to meet the academic and high level thinking needs of exceptionally gifted children. Teachers are not generally certified to prepare curriculum 5 or more grade levels beyond the assigned class.

5) regular counseling (yearly assessment with follow-up if indicated) for exceptionally gifted to address issues, such as sense of profound isolation.

DTAC <u>opposes</u> :

the practice of skipping a single grade as a comprehensive solution for exceptionally gifted children; further modifications will be necessary .

GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED

GOAL : To provide alternative educational opportunities for TAG children who are isolated due to low numbers of TAG children at their local school.

DTAC supports

1) offering regional grouping by administrative transfer of TAG children whose local school provides fewer than 5 intellectual peers. (Note: 2 first graders gifted in math, 1 third grader gifted in science, 1 fourth grader gifted in language arts, and 1 fifth grader gifted in math do not constitute 5 intellectual peers.)

2) informing parents of the option for administrative transfer for the purpose of regional grouping of TAG children. Providing information to the parents regarding the potential benefits of placing their child in a classroom with opportunity for interaction with intellectual peers.

3) development of a written comprehensive plan to meet the needs of geographically isolated TAG children at a regional site. This plan needs to be communicated to all parents of geographically isolated children in the spring prior to offering them transfers to the site.

4) development of an alternative plan to meet the academic and social needs of geographically isolated TAG children whose parents decline administrative transfer to regional TAG sites.

5) regular counseling (yearly assessment with follow-up if indicated) for geographically isolated TAG children who chose to remain at their local schools.

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SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL NEEDS

GOAL : To adapt TAG programs and policies in ways which ensure that the TAG child's social and emotional needs are met appropriately.

DTAC supports

1) education of principals, TAG coordinators, child development specialists, teachers, and parents about the social/emotional needs of TAG children, e.g., the warning signs of disengagement or social isolation. These efforts should include meetings to inform and support parents.

2) recognition that academic frustration may lead to inappropriate behavior, withdrawal, or depression.

3) maintaining reasonable work expectations for TAG children, e.g., differentiated classroom work should not be excessive or force children to choose appropriate instruction over age appropriate social, creative, or physical experiences.

4) recognition of the diversity of TAG children with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, maturity, creativity, physical ability, coping skills, and learning style, to name a few. Many are "doubly-identified", with physical or learning disabilities.

5) recognition that TAG children are not necessarily more capable of taking charge of their own learning than other children of the same age.

6) recognition that mastery of a subject does not necessarily prepare a child to teach peers.

7) encouraging TAG children to pursue their academic or creative passions and share the results as a contributor to the class community.

8) flexible grouping patterns that will allow TAG children to 'be themselves' with intellectual peers, rather than 'hiding their strengths' to conform.

9) provision of individual or group counseling for children whose giftedness creates social or emotional distress.

DTAC opposes

1) the notion that TAG children will survive 'no matter what' because of exceptional capabilities.

2) allowing TAG child to 'float through' school, never needing to work hard, accept constructive criticism, or develop work habits by meeting challenges.

3) parents, teachers, and test administrators "pushing" TAG children to be the "best," or use of language which implies "better than" others.

4) use of the nomenclature "TAG" or "gifted" in front of students. This language may serve to further isolate children, or imply "better." It is sufficient to call children from their classroom for "math," "testing," etc.

5) isolation of a TAG child by frequent independent work, individualized instruction, or attitudes that tend to repeatedly differentiate the child in the classroom community.

6) scheduling independent TAG work during socially important class times, such as during P.E., the artists-in-residence program, etc

TIME WITH INTELLECTUAL PEERS

GOAL : To provide each TAG student sufficient time and appropriate experiences working with intellectual peers.

DTAC supports

1) clustering TAG children in classrooms at all levels.

2) giving TAG children at least 4 hours per week with intellectual peers during the school day.

3) working to increase time with intellectual peers to 8 hours per week.

4) offering challenging, supervised activities to students who are grouped for time with intellectual peers.

DTAC opposes

1) assigning fewer than three TAG children to a classroom.

2) local school policies that recommend or require a uniform distribution of TAG students throughout all classrooms.

COMMUNICATION

(issues not discussed by specific topic elsewhere)

GOAL : To make optimum learning experiences possible by establishing excellent communication between and among teachers, parents, students, principals, and administrators.

DTAC supports

1) regular parent involvement including

   a) production and distribution of a handbook for TAG parents.

   b) making sure that all TAG children and their parents are aware of the advanced programs which are already available.

   c) use of building meetings for parents of TAG children at least twice a year.

   d) establishment by principals of building TAG committees, on which parents are represented. Use of a specific process for electing parents to the building TAG committee; they should not be informally chosen by a TAG coordinator or principal.

   e) encouragement of all TAG parents to attend meetings which discuss the evaluation of their own child, and to supply relevant information.

   f) TAG parent representation on all regional and district committees involved in TAG planning.

   g) provision of timely information to parents about DTAC meetings.

2) communication of guidelines, for teaching TAG children, to all principals and teachers. Such guidelines should include: teaching at rate and level, ability grouping, need for time with peers, advanced assignments in replacement for regular work, etc.

3) a clear and concise appeals and complaint process, including

   a) communication to all principals, TAG coordinators, teachers, and parents regarding the chain of responsibility for TAG implementation and the appeals process.

   b) timely and accurate recording of all complaints, appeals, and their resolutions. This will aid in identifying trends.

LEADERSHIP

GOAL : To provide checks and balances to ensure that appropriate TAG services are consistently delivered throughout the district.

DTAC supports

1) follow-through by principals to ascertain if services are being delivered in a timely fashion, e.g., if GSP's are signed, if quarterly GSP evaluations are completed, etc.

2) principal initiated formation of building TAG planning committees and building TAG parent meetings.

3) follow-through from the region or district to ascertain if services are being delivered in a timely fashion.

4) authority at the district level to establish TAG implementation guidelines which will increase uniformity of services throughout the district and improve transitions between grades and between schools.

5) authority at the district level to review local TAG plans and programs. Subsequent authority to require appropriate changes.

6) the authority for district TAG personnel to initiate review of specific TAG programs or cases.

7) a clearly defined "chain of command," with the district ultimately responsible for appropriate services.

TAG BUDGET

GOAL : Assuring that the benefit from TAG funds are maximized for TAG students.

DTAC supports

1) using TAG funds to achieve appropriate rate and level instruction for all TAG children.

2) maintaining centralized expert TAG staff for the purposes of communication, testing, teacher training, 'trouble-shooting', evaluating programs, overseeing TAG policy, and monitoring delivery of TAG services.
3) funding teaching assistants, tutors, off-campus or college classes, and/or special education teachers when necessary to deliver rate and level instruction.
4) local schools accounting for both the usage of funds and the actual use of the resource purchased with the funds.

5) seeking extra funding through grants, for example, to develop or adapt curriculum for rate and level instruction, facilitate curriculum compacting, review national resources, evaluate current rate and level instruction, etc.

6) bringing nationally recognized TAG experts to the district for teacher, administrator, and parent workshops, lectures, or symposiums.

DTAC opposes

1) using TAG funds for extracurricular activities or "enrichment" programs.

2) using TAG funds to purchase items needed to enhance general school programs.

'TAG' TEACHERS

GOAL : To provide each TAG child with a teacher prepared to make appropriate adjustments to curriculum to address diverse rate and level needs.

DTAC supports

1) TAG teacher training program and/or a process by which teachers identify themselves as willing and able to teach/facilitate students needing curriculum adjustments up to four grade levels beyond the class.

2) provision of at least one pathway through each elementary school taught by TAG identified teachers.

3) development of a team approach by teachers of TAG students within each school to ensure the smooth articulation of services from year to year, and to facilitate the appropriate grouping of students.

DTAC opposes

1) equal numerical distribution of TAG children into all classes

2) placement of TAG children with teachers who do not want them and/or resent their need for a differentiated curriculum.

3) placement of TAG children with teachers whose teaching style does not facilitate flexible grouping.

SELF-CONTAINED ACCELERATED PROGRAM

GOAL : To continue to review the professional literature and retain the option of a self-contained accelerated program to meet the rate and level needs of students whose needs are not easily met in the neighborhood classroom.

DTAC supports

1) a "magnet" school option to provide a program of full-time appropriate instruction for students whose academic rate and level needs are not easily met in the neighborhood classroom (see positions on Exceptionally Gifted and Geographically Isolated.)

2) equal access for all TAG students in the PPS service area whose rate and level needs are not easily met.

3) providing this program at a cost no greater than the per child cost in a typical PPS classroom.

4) utilizing such a program as a demonstration project to develop curricula or refine appropriate strategies for instruction of TAG students throughout the district.

5) part time options for students who prefer to remain in their neighborhood schools but have single subject acceleration needs that cannot be met at the local school.

6) provision for the social and emotional development, as well as the academic needs of these students.

7) review of the professional literature as a basis for determining the appropriateness of a self-contained accelerated program.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES

It must be noted that not all parents and students are equipped to follow through with some or all of the following. Because teachers, principals, and administrators are trained professionals, the burden of delivering appropriate services must be on them.

Parents should :

1) when advocating for their child, try to establish a positive, cooperative approach with the teacher.

2) discuss their child's previous educational experiences, temperment, and learning style with the teacher.

3) have frequent discussions with their child about what the child is learning and which aspects of what they are learning excite them. When appropriate, they should give feedback to the teachers.

4) review and approve GSPs. They should be certain that GSPs are written to address the child's assessed level and rate of learning.

5) regularly view the child's portfolio.

6) attend building meetings for parents of TAG children.

7) follow the appropriate procedures for appeals and complaints.

8) understand and communicate that being "advanced" is not the same as being "better."

Students should :

1) discuss with their parents and teachers the things they are learning and suggest ways to improve their educational experience.

2) complete contracted assignments in a timely manner.

3) behave responsibly.

4) behave respectfully toward other students and all staff members.

5) not abuse special responsibilities, e.g., release off campus for independent study.

6) understand that being "advanced" is not the same as being "better."

7) try to learn to work with both age and intellectual peers where cooperation is appropriate.

8) accept counseling when appropriate.